

Call for *AAU Excellence* - a two-year talent programme for early career researchers

As a part of Aalborg University's strategic aim to promote excellent research, early career researchers at AAU are now invited to send an application to the new research talent programme *AAU Excellence* with a phase 1 deadline on the 26th of August at 12 pm. This call will explain the content of the programme, the evaluation criteria, financing, and the assessment process including timeline.

1. Background and Purpose

AAU is launching a new research talent programme *AAU Excellence*. The purpose of the programme is to enhance the academic qualifications of early career researchers. *AAU Excellence* seek to raise the bar for excellent research at AAU, hence giving early career researchers an opportunity to develop their research competencies and mature their research ideas into groundbreaking and creative research and prepare them to apply and ultimately secure prestigious research career grants.

The programme aims to develop the participants' competencies within areas like:

- Research skills and profile.
- Grant application.
- Research leadership.
- Maturing groundbreaking and creative research ideas.

Through the programme the participants will work on enhancing an independent research profile, including:

- Publishing original research in internationally recognized journals and/or proceedings.
- Establishing international scientific networks and creating international awareness and collaboration.
- Enhancing research leadership skills.
- Securing external funding.

2. Content

The *AAU Excellence* programme focuses on career development of a select group of the best and brightest of AAU's early career researchers. Each year AAU selects eight new participants for the programme – two from each faculty. Participants are enrolled into the programme for a period of two years. Within this time the participants will complete a specialised curriculum put together by a scientific board consisting of international top professors across all four AAU faculties.

The programme's content is defined within five areas:

- Research
Maturing your research ideas and skills.
- Competency development
E.g. introduction to the prestigious grants, scientific grant writing, research leadership, media training.
- Mentoring
Participants are assigned one or more mentors with a focus on the participant's career development.

- Networking
Establishing network within one's own research field as well as interdisciplinary. Developing international profile and network.
- Exclusive events
E.g. inspirational meet ups with international top researchers, university management and representatives from scientific foundations.

The five areas have been selected to ensure a broad, professionally enriching programme which provides participants with the right prerequisites to further their individual research career and to give the best conditions for securing prestigious career grants.

Participation in the programme is expected to take up the participants allocated research time – estimated at around 40 percent of normal working hours. Within this time frame participants will have the opportunity to focus on the aims of the programme – competency development, maturing their research ideas, establishing own network, and developing an independent research profile. An estimated 25 percent of the participant's time within the programme will be allocated to mandatory activities within competency development and networking.

3. Funding and Terms and Conditions

To pursue the aims of the programme each participants receives a grant of 250,000 DKK per year, resulting in a total grant of 500,000 DKK over the two-year duration of the programme. The grant is specifically for (but not exclusively limited to) the following purposes:

- Research leadership courses.
- Other competency development.
- Research travels, network activities, and conference activities.
- Equipment, data packages, and laboratory access.

The departments are committed to co finance the programme in-kind, thus making the participants' research hours fully dedicated to the programme.

The awarded grant must be spent on activities related to the participation in the programme. The grant is evenly divided between the two years and funds cannot be transferred from one year to another.

4. Who can apply?

Applicants must be researchers employed at AAU. Acceptance into the programme is possible for all researchers with a PhD age of up till five years¹. External applicants can apply for the programme if they have a signed employment contract with AAU by the time they are enrolled into the programme.

If the grant holder leaves AAU during the grant period, the grant will not follow the grant holder. The remaining grant will be returned to the grant provider.

¹ A PhD age of five years is calculated from the time of receiving a PhD degree. The calculation considers parental and sick leave.

Successful candidates are enrolled in the programme the 1st of January 2025.

5. Assessment of Applications

All interested applicants for AAU Excellence are invited to prepare a phase 1 application. For the preparation of the application, the application form (see appendix 2) is used. For a full timeline for the application process see appendix 1.

The assessment is a three-step process:

Phase 1:

- Expression of interest (500 words on scientific visions and 300 words on career potential and 200 words on host environment) – see further information below.
- CV (max. 2 pages. Highlight up to the three most important research publications)
- List three potential external scientific peer reviewers within the applicant's own research field. The suggested reviewers must be on minimum associate professor level and cannot be AAU employed. The applicant must be aware of any conflict of interest from the possible reviewers. At least two of the three suggested reviewers must be employed at a university outside Denmark.

All phase 1 applications will be assessed by an internal selection committee of representatives from the scientific board of AAU Excellence and AAU's vice deans for research. The 16 most qualified applicants (max four from each faculty) are shortlisted to phase 2. All applicants shortlisted will be invited to submit a full application. Further information on phase 2 will be available for those who are selected.

Phase 2:

- Full application (1500 words on scientific visions and 900 words on career potential and 600 words on host environment)
- CV similar to Phase 1
- From the Head of the applicant's AAU Department, a written declaration of support including a description on how the applicant's research aligns with the departments current and future plans (max 500 words).

All phase 2 applications will be assessed by two external scientific reviewers within the applicant's field of research. Before the interview applicants will receive their external assessment.

Phase 3: Interview. All phase 2 applicants are invited to a 30-minute interview with the scientific board of AAU Excellence before the board makes the final selection. Eight applicants will be selected for enrolment into the programme – two from each faculty.

Assessment Criteria

The evaluation within each phase will be based on three assessment criteria: Applicant's scientific vision, applicant's career potential and applicant's host environment.

Scientific vision

Scientific vision is assessed based on their ability to formulate their research ambitions for the next five to ten years. This includes the originality of the proposed research vision, its potential impact, the scientific approach, and its feasibility.

Career potential

Career potential is assessed on the applicant's research skills, scientific achievements, level of independence as a researcher, communication skills, collaborations, international network, and research stays abroad. The applicant is asked to describe how the applicant envisions to enhance research skills to become competitive for a tenure position at an international research institution.

Host environment

The applicant's host environment and research environment are assessed on support and guidance from more established scientists, suitability for the applicant's career development, commitment and scientific competences and facilities.

Important Dates for Phase 1 applicants

- The 26th of August 2024 at 12 pm: Deadline for phase 1 applications.
- The 11th of September 2024: Applicants will be notified if they are shortlisted for phase 2.

Contact Details

Any further information regarding the call can be obtained from:

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